



# WHEN IT COMES TO TOBACCO, QUITTERS WIN

You've tried to quit, but you can't. Or maybe someone you love smokes and isn't trying to stop. Whether you've tried to stop smoking one time or a dozen, this article is for you.

## Why can't you break the habit?

The quick answer is, "Because it isn't a habit." Chronic tobacco use — smoking, dipping, or chewing — is a physical addiction that's hard to break. It's a mental addiction too.

Withdrawal symptoms can include obsessive thoughts. So calling tobacco use a "habit" doesn't take into account how hard it is to quit.

It takes preparation to stop. Before you can break the addiction, you need to:

- Know what to expect
- Have a plan
- Know your tobacco-cessation goals

Start a journal a few weeks before your quit date and record everything you can think of about your tobacco use. Why did you start? How many cigarettes a day do you smoke? When? If you dig deep enough, you'll probably identify specific situations that trigger your urge to smoke.

The average "quitter" stops smoking — sometimes for a year or more — and restarts six times before quitting for good. After a while, it gets harder to believe you'll ever succeed. But think of it this way: those other times you tried were "practice quits." You were just working up to the real thing.

## Break on through!

Now that you know why you've had trouble giving up tobacco, are you ready to quit? If so, build a plan using these steps:

- **Determine why you want to stop.** You know why you smoke, but now you need a reason not to. Concerned about your health? Your family? Your wallet? Let your motivation guide you.

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- **Set a quit date.** People who work toward a specific date are more likely to succeed. After you've set the date:
  - Put your quit date on your calendar and tell friends and family that's when you'll stop.
  - Decide whether you want to use nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). These products provide slow, steady doses of nicotine — without the deadly toxins and heart-damaging tar — which can relieve a lot of your physical withdrawal symptoms.
  - Nicotine gum, patches, and lozenges are available without a prescription.
  - If you can, start reducing your daily number of cigarettes. You'll have less nicotine in your system when your quit date rolls around.
  - The day before your quit date, get rid of all your ashtrays and any extra cigarettes. Soak your smokes in water so you can't "sneak just one." And have your NRT ready if you've decided to use it.
- **Find a buddy.** It's easier to break an addiction if you have someone to talk to. Your best bet is someone who's been there. You may want to contact a nicotine addiction support group in your area.
- **Substitute.** Decide what you'll do instead of smoking. A walk to the water fountain can help with restlessness, and drinking water helps clear the toxins out of your system. If you need the feel of a cigarette, try chewing on celery or cinnamon sticks instead.
- **Don't give up!** If you just have to have a smoke or a chew, you haven't failed. Remember, nearly everyone has "practice quits." You're still a step closer to your final quit.

### Unexpected benefits of quitting

Sure, giving up tobacco can reduce your risk of cancer, but some of its other benefits might pleasantly surprise you.

- Just 20 minutes after your last cigarette, your blood pressure decreases, your pulse rate drops, and your circulation improves.
- Within the first 24 hours, your chance of a heart attack decreases.
- At 48 hours, your senses of smell and taste begin improving.
- From two weeks to three months, your circulation improves even more and lung function increases.
- Between one and nine months, coughing, congestion, fatigue, and shortness of breath decrease.

- At one year, you're at half your previous risk of heart disease.
- Between five and 15 years after quitting, your stroke risk decreases to the same as people who never smoked.
- At 10 years, your risk of lung cancer can be as low as half a smoker's risk, and your risk of ulcers and many cancers drops too.
- By 15 years, your risk of heart disease and your overall life expectancy are almost the same as someone who never smoked.

Of course, you'll have to deal with temporary negative effects, like:

- Withdrawal symptoms — Irritability, headaches, weight gain, and inability to sleep are common. You may feel tired because you're not resting as well as usual and also because nicotine acts as a stimulant.
- Increased coughing — This symptom isn't withdrawal. It's a sign your lungs are trying to get clear and start healing. It should last only a few days, but if you're still coughing a month after you quit, see your doctor.
- "Milestone" relapses — The mental obsession with tobacco can hang on long after you think you're over it. Especially at milestones like a week, a month, or a year without smoking, you may be tempted to celebrate with "just one." But remember: there's no such thing as "just one." You've come this far — hang in there and keep going.

Don't forget: the negative effects are strictly temporary. They'll go away, but the benefits keep getting better.

### How to help someone quit

You may have tried to get someone you love to stop using tobacco and found your efforts unappreciated. These ideas may help you be heard:

- Express concern, not accusations — "I want you to be here a long time" is much better than "You smell like an ashtray."
- Keep it short — If you bring up the subject of smoking, limit it to five minutes.
- Don't nag — Mention quitting no more than twice a year.
- Actively participate — When your smoker decides it's time to quit, be supportive. Listen when he or she needs to talk. Join your former smoker in substitute activities like exercise to keep motivated. Offer praise and rewards when your former smoker reaches a milestone — it will help him or her say "no" to "just one."

You can encourage change, but you can't change someone else. In the end, you can only change your response to what others do.

### Bottom line

Can you do it? Yes, you can! You can live free of tobacco. When you decide you're ready, make a plan, set a date, and go for it!

### For more information

- [Humana.com](#) — Log in to [MyHumana](#), your secure website, and look in the "Condition Centers" — under the "Health & Wellness" tab — for information on tobacco cessation.
- American Cancer Society [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
- American Lung Association [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)